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MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director

This is the memorandum you requested on Friday, which Abbot promised for delivery this afternoon. We are making no further distribution unless we have instructions from you.

[redacted]
Acting Director
National Estimates

DCI sent Downtown - Rostow and ?

5 February 1968
(DATE)

25X1

FORM NO. 101 REPLACES FORM 10-101
1 AUG 54 WHICH MAY BE USED. (47)

MEMORANDUM FOR: Mr. R. Jack Smith

This is the memorandum you know about. It has gone to the Director this afternoon.

[redacted]
Acting Director
National Estimates

5 February 1968
(DATE)

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MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director

Here is the memorandum you asked us to write for Walt Rostow. I might say that the Board pondered the possibilities for Soviet action in several other areas (e.g., India, Cambodia) and on other subjects (e.g., Sino-Soviet relations), and could think of nothing worth adding.

ABBOT SMITH
Director
National Estimates

Attachment
Memo to DCI - 5 Feb - "Second Front" Hypothesis
cc: DD/I

19 February 1968
(DATE)

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S-E-C-R-E-T

C E N T R A L I N T E L L I G E N C E A G E N C Y

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

5 February 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: The "Second Front" Hypothesis

1. Will the Soviets pose a major challenge to the US at some other point of confrontation in order to assist the Communist cause in Vietnam? When put previously, this question has been answered in the negative. The present stage of the struggle in Vietnam perhaps makes it relevant again.

2. There has not been much doubt, at least since 1964, that the Soviets regard the "national liberation" struggle in Vietnam and the burdens it places on American policy and resources as advantageous to them in the perspective of the broader Soviet-American competition. They have given great and essential material aid to the North Vietnamese. Their propaganda and diplomacy have been tireless in support of Hanoi, increasing wherever possible the political costs the US has had to bear because of its involvement. Clearly, they would welcome an

11th to 19th
memo to DCI

GROUP 1
Excluded from automatic downgrading and declassification

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outcome which constituted a defeat for the US, not only because this would mean a local advance for Communist forces, but also, and perhaps more importantly, because of the setback to US power and influence generally. If some diversionary action of theirs could insure this result, it might appear that they would have every reason to undertake it.

How the Soviet Leaders Might Calculate

3. A Soviet decision to move in this way is more complex than appears at first blush, however. Some sense of this can be obtained by posing the questions which the Soviet leadership would ask itself in making its calculations about a diversionary action.

4. Is the Soviet move necessary to Communist success in Vietnam? -- The actual Soviet estimate of the outlook for the war is not known. If Moscow believes that Communist victory is certain eventually, it has no incentive to do much more than it is already doing. If it believes the war is at a stalemate, it probably considers that a more direct involvement would limit its ability to help the Communist side in eventual negotiations. Meantime, Soviet propaganda can continue to exploit the war against the US in many areas. Probably only if the Soviets believed that a

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diversionary move by them was necessary to avert collapse of the Communist effort in South Vietnam would they have compelling reason to entertain such a move at all. There is no indication that they estimate the situation in Vietnam in this way.

5. Is Hanoi's victory in the South vital for the USSR? -- It is unlikely that the Soviets believe that it is. They were not a party to Hanoi's initial decisions, and everything we know about the North Vietnamese leadership indicates that it would probably not assert that the Soviets had an obligation to act to insure success. There is evidence that in the early phase of American direct involvement the Soviets counseled negotiations and were rebuffed. They do not assert that any security interest of their own is involved. Finally, the Soviets must know that, even if Hanoi won, its support for Moscow in the latter's contest with Peking for influence in the Communist movement would not be assured. In this regard, in fact, a failure of Hanoi's adventure in South Vietnam might be as auspicious.

6. Could there be assurance that pressures on the US elsewhere would achieve the desired effect, i.e., cause the US to abandon its objectives in Vietnam? -- The Soviet leaders would

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probably have to give a problematical answer. They would recognize that a threat to transform the issue into a general Soviet-American confrontation could harden American will rather than the contrary. Some if not all of those in this and other countries who oppose the American course in Vietnam would take a new view of what was at stake. The resulting political climate might make it easier for the US Administration to undertake a fuller mobilization of military resources. Further, when world opinion recognized that the Vietnam issue had broadened into a dangerous Soviet-American confrontation, demands would mount sharply that all parties negotiate at once. Hanoi, too, would then be heavily pressured to abandon its dilatory tactics and to negotiate without preconditions, the precise result US policy has long sought.

7. Could the cure turn out to be worse than the disease, i.e., might a diversionary crisis bring on direct Soviet-American hostilities, or at least high and uncontrollable risks of them? -- Something would obviously depend on the locale and intensity of the challenge posed. But if the Soviets aimed at a significant diversion of American military resources from Vietnam, or at convincing the US that it faced a major setback in some other area, then the challenge would have to be formidable indeed. Ugly

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words or gestures would not be enough; Soviet practice has long since depreciated such currency. If Moscow actually did something big enough to have a serious effect on the US, then it could scarcely escape some considerable measure of risk. It is entirely possible that the Soviets think that there is no effective diversionary move they can make, the risks of which are not out of all proportion to whatever stake they have in Communist success in South Vietnam. Moreover, to make the attempt and fail would not only be costly to the USSR itself but damaging to the Communist cause in Vietnam.

8. Would the challenging move by the USSR involve costs for other aspects of Soviet policy or in other areas? -- The Soviet leaders are aware that in many countries they are credited with having renounced bad old aggressive habits in favor of peaceful methods. For some opinion, the US involvement in war has heightened Soviet repute by contrast. Threatening Soviet moves in areas other than Vietnam would revive old memories, even though some would still find it easy to blame the US for such a turn in Soviet policy. The tactics of Communist parties in Western countries, now aimed at establishing political alliances with non-Communist groups, would probably be compromised. The Soviets

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would even consider the cost to bilateral relations with the US. Bad as these have been, they have not precluded movement on some matters in which the Soviets have an interest, for example, the NPT. And Washington's hopes for certain constructive developments in Soviet-American relations have caused it to tolerate Soviet aid to Hanoi. Sharp new Soviet-American tensions would change the setting and the play in many ways which Moscow would probably see as potentially disadvantageous.

Where and How

9. Questions like those above, which the Soviet leaders would inevitably ask themselves, make it clear that a decision to incite a major crisis elsewhere would be at least a very complicated one. Still, they obviously have such a capability. When they ask themselves where and how specifically they should act, however, the decision would probably seem even tougher.

10. Berlin. -- This chronic focus of crisis has the advantage of insuring maximum Soviet control; the screw has been turned there with great delicacy in the past. Beyond a certain point, however, no area of possible confrontation carries greater danger. Even well short of maximum risk, moreover, gains which have been

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registered in Western European attitudes toward the USSR, with all that these imply for Soviet hopes of undermining the American position in Europe, would tend to be reversed. While some might blame American policy for causing new tensions in Europe, very few would accept a Soviet power play in Berlin with equanimity. Even the USSR's allies in Eastern Europe, except perhaps East Germany, would be appalled by a new crisis over Berlin.

11. Korea. -- The Soviets appear to have given at least tacit approval to North Korea's policy of armed subversion against the ROK. So far this has had no effect on US and ROK policy in Vietnam. And Pyongyang, despite the Pueblo incident, appears to have no stomach for raising the ante to the point where renewed hostilities could result. The Soviets must recognize that the margin for additional pressure in this theater without bringing this result is narrow. Yet, if there is war, they would be committed in a far more overt way to a regime over which they have far less control than was the case in 1950. The risk of direct Soviet-American hostilities would be greater. The US effort in Vietnam would appear much more plausibly as resistance to a general thrust of Communist aggression in Asia. The resultant change in perspectives would set back Soviet policy

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in a number of Asian states, and especially in Japan, where a burgeoning trade must seem to hold promise for future Soviet influence.

12. The Middle East -- Here the Soviets would presumably have to act through clients whose reliability and controllability is far from assured. The Arabs will hardly be ready for another round with Israel very soon, and the Soviets have already demonstrated that they do not care to take a direct hand in that quarrel. Moreover, the June war had no effect on the US effort in Vietnam, even though insofar as they played a part in the preliminaries to that event, the Soviets may have thought they were storing up diversionary trouble for the US. Other Middle East tensions could become aggravated (e.g., in the Persian Gulf), but it is hard to see how these could be either on a scale sufficient to have a bearing on the US effort in Vietnam or manipulable by the Soviets to that end.

13. The three areas mentioned are obvious examples; no doubt there are others where Soviet mischief-making might contrive to produce crises of some sort. But it is doubtful that such crises would meet what would appear to be essential criteria: to create a disturbance significant enough to have a real effect on

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American policy in Vietnam; to permit close management of risks by the USSR and preclude irresponsible conduct by clients; to avoid important compromises or setbacks for Soviet policy, in the immediate area or generally, which could outweigh whatever the Soviets might gain from possible Communist success in South Vietnam.

Conclusion

14. This analysis, like that made in earlier estimates, finds little to credit in the "second front" hypothesis. It still seems unlikely that the Soviets, in order to further Communist aims in Vietnam, would move against the US elsewhere in some dramatic way. It seems out of character for the present leadership, and incompatible with what it appears to believe it has at stake in Vietnam. But, as indicated, the calculations involved are complicated, and there can be no complete assurance that Soviet judgments would fall out in the manner set down here, either now or at some later stage as the context changes.

15. It is certain, however, that short of the kind of dramatic move considered in this paper, Soviet policy will continue to seize all occasions to harass and complicate the

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American effort in Vietnam. Where possible, others will be incited to do the same. Anywhere that the American preoccupation with Vietnam offers an opportunity to extend the USSR's influence and reduce that of the US, it will be taken. This much at least seems clearly dictated by the Soviet leaders' present view of their interests.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:

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Acting Chairman

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